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THE DIARY OF A VOYAGE TO THE UNITED STATES,
BY MOREAU DE SAINT-MERY.

By STEWART L. MIMS.

(Read April 18, 1912.)

In his *Souvenirs intimes sur Talleyrand*, published at Paris in 1870, M. Amédée Pichot remarked in his preface:

"If we were to write a complete biography of Talleyrand, we would be able to give some details, very little known, concerning his exile in America, where M. de Beaumetz and he found themselves with other notable émigrés among whom was Moreau de Saint-Méry. . . . This information has been obtained from an unpublished diary, kept by Moreau de Saint-Méry, which M. Margry has examined and from which he has communicated to us certain extracts concerning the sojourn of Talleyrand at New York, Boston and Philadelphia."

Pichot made two quotations from this "unpublished diary," one at pp. 209-212, describing the intimate relations existing between Talleyrand and Moreau, the other at pp. 212-213 giving the text of a letter written by Talleyrand to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs to acknowledge a letter inclosing the decree of September 3, 1795, which reopened the doors of France to the famous exile. Pichot contented himself with these two citations, either because his friend Margry¹ did not choose to give him more material, or because the limitations of his own study did not permit him to quote more extensively from the notes which were actually communicated to him.

Although many studies have appeared on the life of Talleyrand since 1870 and some have made use of Pichot's citations, apparently none, not even such recent biographers as MacCabe, Lacombe and

¹ Pierre Margry, author of "Mémoires et Documents pour servir à l'histoire des origines françaises des pays d'outre-mer" and of some studies relating to the history of French colonization in America, was at this time archivist at the Ministry of the Marine.

Loliée,² have attempted to find the source from which the citations were taken to see whether it contained other interesting material upon the sojourn of the great diplomat in America.

It was my good fortune, a little over a year ago, to find in the manuscript catalogue of the *Archives Coloniales* at Paris, the title, "Le Voyage aux Etats-Unis de l'Amérique par Moreau de Saint-Méry pendant les années de 1793 à 1798."

Although it called me far afield from the work in which I was engaged, I could not resist the temptation to cast a furtive glance at the manuscript to see what its interesting title meant. That furtive glance grew into the absorbing task of reading from page to page until I had finished the story which the volume contained—a story all but forgotten and lost for three generations among the dusty archives of the Colonial Office.³ It is to this story that I wish to direct your attention for a few moments.

With the author of the diary many of you are already acquainted from the paper which one of your members presented before this society at its last annual meeting.⁴ Permit me to recall, however, the salient facts in his life.

Born at Fort Royal, Martinique, on January 13, 1750, Médéric-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry⁵ was of a family which had emigrated from Poitou to settle at Martinique in the seventeenth century and had won a place of prominence by furnishing in succeeding

² MacCabe, "Talleyrand, a Biographical Study," London, 1906; Bernard de Lacombe, "La vie intime de Talleyrand," Paris, 1910; Frédéric Loliée, "Talleyrand et la société française," Paris, 1910.

³ Victor Tantet, late archivist of the *Archives Coloniales*, made use of the diary to write a very interesting article which appeared in *La Revue* (1905), Vol. 52, pp. 378–396, and entitled "Les Réfugiés politiques français en Amérique sous la Convention—Moreau de Saint-Méry libraire à Philadelphie." I knew nothing of the existence of this article until after I had found and studied the diary.

⁴ Joseph G. Rosengarten, "Moreau de Saint-Méry and his French Friends in the American Philosophical Society," *Proceedings* of this Society, Vol. 50, pp. 168–182.

⁵ This short sketch of Moreau is based on Silvestre, "Notice Biographique sur M. Moreau de Saint-Méry," Paris, 1819 (a short pamphlet of 24 pp.), and Fournier-Pescay's article in *Biographie Universelle* on Moreau de Saint-Méry.

generations many judges to the principal courts of the island. After spending his boyhood days at Martinique, the young Moreau, at the age of nineteen, took ship for France to acquire that training in the principles of the law which would fit him to follow in the footsteps of his fathers.

After his arrival at Paris, he began to study with such rare enthusiasm and success that at the end of fourteen months he sustained his thesis in Latin and received the degree of bachelor of law. At the end of three years he won the honor of attaining the rank of *avocat au parlement* and was prepared to turn his face towards his native island in order to follow his chosen profession.

At his return to Martinique he found himself an orphan, the fortune of the family in ruins and nothing to rely upon, in making a place for himself in the world, except the training which he had just received. The French colony of St. Domingo, the richest of all the West India islands, seemed to offer a more promising future and accordingly he left Martinique and settled at Cap Français (to-day Cape Haiti) in 1772 to begin the practice of law. After eight years of successful practice, he was elected a member of the *conseil supérieur* of St. Domingo. It was in the discharge of the duties of this office that Moreau began the difficult task of codifying the laws of the island in order that his decision as a judge might be more intelligent and scientific.

The previous attempts which had been made to codify these laws in 1716, 1738 and 1757 had not been successful. The King had commissioned de la Rivière in 1771 to undertake the task, but his work had been slow and discouraging. Hearing that Moreau was engaged in the same work, de la Rivière gracefully gave way to the younger and more competent man. In preparation for his work Moreau visited all parts of St. Domingo, Martinique, Guadeloupe and St. Lucia, thus laying the basis for that larger and later work of preparing his monumental collection of documents, relating to the history of the French West Indies and to be found today in the *Archives Coloniales* at Paris—a collection which has made his name immortal among all students of West India history. He received a commission from Louis XVI. to return to Paris in order to com-

plete and publish the results of his work. From 1784 to 1790 appeared successively the six volumes of his well-known collection of laws, entitled "Loix et Constitutions des Colonies françaises de l'Amérique sous le Vent."

At his return to Paris, Moreau quickly won admission into the intellectual and political life of the capital. He became one of the founders of the Musée de Paris and contributed much to its efficiency. At the outbreak of the revolution in 1789, he became one of its ardent champions. He was chosen as one of the electors of Paris, who at one time virtually ruled over all France. He boasted afterwards during his exile that in serving as their president he was "king of Paris for three days." He was deputy of Martinique in the *Constituante*, and played an important part, especially in matters which related to the administration of the colonies.

But with Robespierre's accession to power and the inauguration of the Reign of Terror in 1793, Moreau was forced to flee from Paris and seek refuge in Normandy. It was only a temporary refuge that he found, however, for Robespierre placed his name upon the fatal list of those for whose blood he thirsted. Gathering up all that he held most precious, among them the manuscripts of some unpublished works, Moreau escaped with his family to Havre, where by good fortune a ship was ready to sail for the new world.

It was therefore in quality of an *émigré* that Moreau de Saint-Méry set out upon a voyage to the United States. He sailed from Havre on November 9, 1793, aboard the *Sophie* (Lowther, Captain) bound for New York. After a long struggle against head winds and frequent storms, lasting for one hundred and nineteen days the vessel was forced to put in at Norfolk, where it cast anchor on March 8, 1794.⁶ After a stay of two months at Norfolk, Moreau proceeded by water to Baltimore, passing thence to New York by way of Wilmington, Philadelphia and Princeton. He remained at New York from May 25 to August 21, being forced to earn his living by hard work as shipping clerk for the house of Daniel Merian, which was only a "*prête-nom*" to conceal the shipment of provisions to the French government. During his residence in New York, Moreau

⁶The diary contains a most interesting account of this voyage.

made the acquaintance of a German nobleman, de la Roche by name, with whom he formed a partnership for the establishment at Philadelphia of a stationery and book-store and printing shop. He accordingly removed to Philadelphia, where he remained from October 14, 1794, to August 23, 1798, when he set sail for France.

It is the story of these five years in America that Moreau de Saint-Méry records in his diary. Step by step one may follow him to hear his appreciation of the hospitality of old Virginia or his enthusiasm over the beauty and charm of the Virginia belle, whose musical voice seems to have fired his heart; or to hear him marvel at the number of religious sects at Baltimore, all living in the perfect harmony of an attractive society, or one may turn to the descriptions of the life of New York and Philadelphia. In these descriptions and throughout the diary are to be found many interesting data on the prices, the cost of living, the expenses of travel, the manners and customs of the people. In other passages one may follow the author into the presence of such public men as Washington, John Adams or Alexander Hamilton. Thus under date of August 26, 1794, is recorded a visit to the last named:

"I went to see the Minister, Hamilton, having a letter of introduction from Talleyrand. On arriving at the building in which his office was located, I found a porter, clad in a long gray vest, who informed me that the minister was not in. On leaving the house and before I had gone very far, I met a gentleman whom I believed, tho' I know not why, to be Hamilton and I turned and followed him. We entered the corridor almost together. On seeing Mr. Hamilton, for it was he, the porter took a key down from a peg and opened the door of the Minister's office and I was asked to enter. I was much pleased that I had been warned not to have the air of being inquisitive or of plying the minister with questions. But he showed great confidence in me by talking frankly of both France and America. . . . I did not fail to be struck by his bureau. Its furniture and furnishings together were not worth more than fifty francs [ten dollars]. A large pine table, covered with a green cloth, served as his desk. His books and papers were upon simple wooden shelves. On the end of one shelf was a slate-colored vase and a plate with some drinking glasses. The porter who waited on him wore, besides the vest of which I have spoken, trousers of the same cloth which did not reach low enough to hide his bare leg. In a word I saw around me what must have been in accord with the customs of the Spartans."

Moreau's later impressions led him to speak of Hamilton as "devoured with the ambition of making people believe that he was

the soul of everything" [in the government] and that "the security of the United States depended entirely upon his ability." Again he wrote:

"Hamilton, who knew only America and was unacquainted with Europe except through books, was a lover of a strong centralized government which knew how to command obedience without compromise. Civil war did not frighten him, because he was a man of courage and had natural military ability and believed and in fact was accustomed to say that the United States would never have a real and stable government until internal dissensions had proved its necessity and caused it to be established. . . . He was of small stature, had an admirable composure, very small eyes and had something of the mysterious in his countenance. He spoke French, but very imperfectly. He was a man of much intelligence and kept a close watch upon himself. He was very brave, disregarded personal interests in his public service, was an admirer of the laws and of the government and financial system of England. He was very dictatorial and was very jealous of the prerogatives of the executive power."

Besides these interesting features, the diary has another of perhaps greater value, namely, some remarkable passages which describe the group of French *émigrés* at Philadelphia and the intimate relations existing between some of the chief among them.

It has already been noted that Moreau de Saint-Méry established a book-store and printing press at Philadelphia. His house was located at the corner of Front and Walnut streets. From the catalogue which he published at the beginning of his career as bookseller,⁷ it can be seen that his store offered for sale many books printed in English, Dutch, Italian, Spanish and French—a fact which must have attracted not only cultured Philadelphians, but also the French *émigrés* in the city. His store became in fact the rendezvous of many notable exiles from France. Talleyrand, de Noailles, Talon, de Beaumetz, Demeunier, La Colombe, La Rochefoucauld, duc de Liancourt, and the duc d'Orléans (the future Louis Philippe) were all visitors at the shop of Moreau. Some of them, including Talleyrand, Blacon and de Beaumetz, frequently remained for supper and like boys scuffled and played pranks upon one another about the store.

In regard to Talleyrand the most notable of the many *émigrés*

⁷ A copy of this catalogue is still to be found in the library of the American Philosophical Society.

who found a temporary refuge in "the ark of Noah," as Philadelphia was happily called by one of them, the diary contains some important data. Moreau's first meeting with Talleyrand in America is recorded under the date of May 22:

"After the end of the session of Congress, I was on my way with my two companions [Goynard and his son] to see the executive mansion which was in the course of construction, . . . when I noticed that in a stage which approached rapidly there were two men waving their hands at us. . . . One of them jumped to the ground and ran to throw himself in my arms. It was Beaumetz. The other, less agile, climbed down from the stage. It proved to be Talleyrand. Both of them had just arrived from England. What joy! What happiness! How many repeated embraces! . . . They invited me to dine with them. I went at once to break the good news to my home and then rejoined them. What a glorious dinner it was! How many things we had to tell one another after two years of separation! After dinner we all went to see Blacon, the comte de Noailles and Talon. New surprises and new rejoicings! During our reunion a hail and thunder storm raged outside as though heaven wished to recall to our minds the misfortunes from which we had escaped in our own country."

From this date forward it is easy to trace in the diary the intimate relations which were established between Moreau and Talleyrand. Here is an entry to tell us that they have dined together, there, another to describe an evening together, or yet another to describe a little group with Talleyrand in their midst to listen to Moreau read from the yet unpublished manuscript of "La Danse" or of his description of St. Domingo. When the two were separated, the diary indicates a constant exchange of notes and of letters. In regard to this, it may be interesting to note in passing, the diary contains no less than seventeen notes and letters from the hand of Talleyrand to his "*cher maître*," as he came to call Moreau in affectionate terms. When Talleyrand was at Philadelphia their relations became most intimate. Moreau's own words must tell the story:

"No words could express adequately the nature of my liaison with Talleyrand. Every day, after his return to Philadelphia in the month of October, 1795 to June 11, 1796 [the date of Talleyrand's departure for Europe], he came to my office at eight in the evening. There alone (except when Beaumetz, Talon, Blacon, de Noailles, Volney or some others came also) we opened our hearts to one another and shared one another's deepest feelings. We told our most intimate secrets. Thus we passed our time

together in delightful communion until supper was announced. Talleyrand ordinarily did not sup, while I ate some rice cooked with milk on the stove in my store. . . . I had some excellent Madeira which Talleyrand liked very much. . . . How many times, after the late hour had dispersed the rest of the company, did Talleyrand go with them across the little court-yard and then steal back to prolong the evening with me. He yielded finally when my wife came and said to him: 'Tomorrow you will stay lazily in your bed until noon, whereas your friend must be up and open his shop at seven.' . . . Thus we passed every evening together without missing a single one, in talking of the past, of the present and of the future of our country. In connection with the future we talked of Louisiana and of plans to colonize it for ourselves. Sometimes we talked seriously of the matter and Talleyrand concluded that we must become the governors.

"In this plan, as well as in others which we made to remain together, Talleyrand and I closed our talks together, our hands clasped in a pledge that for the rest of our lives we would share with one another our failures and our successes even in money matters. . . . In a word never did the common expression, 'united as two fingers of the same hand,' describe so accurately the liaison between two persons as that between Talleyrand and myself."

At his departure for Europe on June 11, 1796, Talleyrand took with him some two hundred copies of Moreau's "*La description de la partie espagnole de St. Domingue*" to find sale for them at Hamburg and in France. He offered to take Moreau's son with him back to Paris and to provide for his education. After his return to Europe Talleyrand did not forget the friend of his days of exile, for the diary contains letters written in affectionate terms from Hamburg and Paris. It was in fact through Talleyrand that Moreau was permitted to return to France and by Talleyrand's pecuniary aid that he was able to take his family from Bordeaux to the capital. It was due to Talleyrand's influence that Moreau obtained shortly afterwards the position of historiographer at the Ministry of the Marine.

The diary closes at a date shortly after Moreau's return to Paris and we are left to conjecture as to what were the relations of the two friends in later life. It seems, however, perfectly plausible to suppose that the appointment of Moreau as ambassodor at Parma in 1801 (later to become and remain its regent until his disgrace by Napoleon in 1806) was the result of Talleyrand's influence exerted in his behalf.

It is pleasant to dwell upon these pages of the diary, because they throw a pleasing light upon Talleyrand's character. He is generally thought of as the prince of diplomats, employing human speech to conceal his own thoughts, but here we have him unveiling his very soul to a kind and sympathetic friend.

The diary shows, however, that Moreau de Saint-Méry's shop became something more than the rendezvous for such notable émigrés. From his printing press went forth many notable works published in French, such as de Liancourt's study on the prisons of Philadelphia, and three of his own notable works, "La Danse," "La description de la partie espagnole de St. Domingue" and "La description de la partie française de St. Domingue."⁸ At his press also was published from October 15, 1795, to March 14, 1796, a daily newspaper in French entitled *Courrier de la France et des Colonies*,⁹ edited by Gaterau, an émigré from St. Domingo. In its pages were printed the latest news of the great revolution in France and of the most recent developments in the French West Indies. How eagerly the numerous émigrés then at Philadelphia and in other cities must have read it! It must have come as a messenger to them in their exile. It served also as a social organ for them, for it contained notices of balls and concerts and meetings of French societies. Moreau's press, therefore, in publishing such a paper must have occupied an important place in the lives of the wider circle of French exiles in Philadelphia. The diary contains passages which throw light upon the life of this wider circle and reveal something of its numbers and of its importance.

There is to be found in the diary, therefore, a wide range of material, varying from passing comments upon public men and upon the customs of the people to serious studies upon the history and life of some of the chief American cities, and including some new and most interesting material upon the life of many exiles who fled from persecutions in France and revolts in the West Indies to find refuge in our fair land of liberty and freedom.

⁸ These three works appeared at Philadelphia during the years 1795-1798.

⁹ A complete file of this unique publication is to be found in the library of the Athenaeum at Boston. It appeared in a single sheet, 4 pages, each page measuring 24½ c.c. by 20 c.c.

In closing, I should like to express my thanks for this opportunity of calling the attention of the American Philosophical Society to this unpublished diary of one of its former members,¹⁰ who must have spent, as indeed its proceedings show, many delightful evenings in its halls and who with pride placed after his name upon the title pages of his well-known works "Member of the American Philosophical Society."

When he sailed upon the voyage which was to take him back to the country and to the people he loved, Moreau de Saint-Méry must have left in this society many friends who thoroughly appreciated his great talents and who had been attracted by his interesting personality. It is fortunate that such a man left for us a record of his sojourn in America and that it is possible to rescue it from the dust of archives.¹¹

¹⁰ Moreau was elected to the society on January 16, 1789, before he left France. The records show that he attended its meetings regularly after his arrival in Philadelphia in the fall of 1794.

¹¹ The diary will be published in the near future at the Yale University Press.